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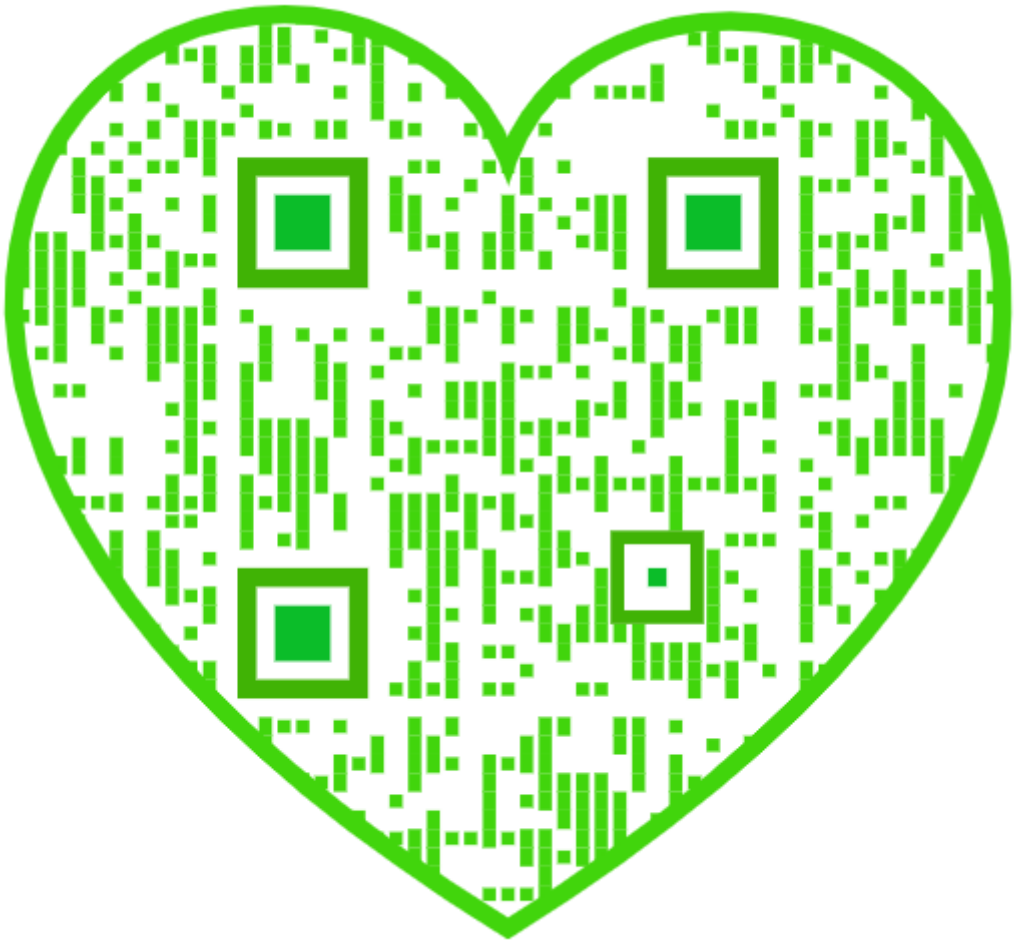
Between Two

Christmas Days.



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Between Two Christmas Days.

G. MOTT WILLIAMS.

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✠

To the beloved memory of

Thomas C. Pitkin, D. D.

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The within verses are gathered from the pages of the Michigan Churchman for 1888.

✠

A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

SWEET Mary's child, the undefiled,
We hail with song to-day!
The spotless worth of the Virgin birth
No tongue of ours can say.

What shall we bring the infant King
Who reigns by love o'er all?
While angel throngs present their songs,
And low before Him fall.

The Father gave to Joseph grave
In trust the heavenly Boy.
But everyone may claim the Son,
Who welcomes Him with joy.

Then hasten near, O Jesu dear!
Our home invites a guest.
While Mary sweet, we blessed greet,
And Thee of all most blest.

A PRAYER FOR LENT.

GOD give me zeal!
My heart beats slow, my will is weak,
With trembling lips I strive to speak.
Like beacons on a mountain peak,
Enkindle zeal.

God give me power!
Strong angels do Thy will on high;
Strong men unhelped by Thee must die;
A weak and sinful child am I,
I need Thy power.

God give me faith!
The world is but a school for doubt,
With flickering fancies tossed about.
O give me grace to put to rout
The foes of faith.

God give me love!
I mount alone the future's hill,
My heart is weary, low and chill,
No human love its needs can fill,
Like Christ, my Love.

God give me peace!
I am afraid, but not with Thee.
Foes strive within, encircle me,
Fighting I live, but comfort see,
In Thy sweet peace.

Thy Passion comes,
Thy Easter, too, Thy heavenly throne.
Leave me in Passion not alone,
Till through Thy grace, like Jesus grown,
My Easter comes.

—*Feb. 11.*

CONTRADICTION OF SINNERS.

GOD wills that life in Nature's scale should rise,
And thus He changes worms to butterflies.
But see how man o'erturns his Maker's terms;
We live like butterflies, and sink to worms.

We feast for vanity, and fast for strife;
We laugh at funerals, fret away our life.
Truth seems but vulgar, error shines as taste.
We skimp in charity, and spend for waste.

Lent brings a mirror, Know thyself, O man!
Strip off thy trappings, seek thy being's plan;
Make gains of losses, well invest thy gains.
Win endless pleasure now, by taking pains.

God sows good seed, but sinners kill the germ.
Plain duty meets a will at best infirm.
Now for repentance, Now the Gospel's day!
The worm replies by boring in the clay.

—*Feb. 25.*

A HEART SONG.

"SWEET home," the homeless poet wrote,
And hearts responsive swell.
But round each hearth the mem'ries float,
Of souls we loved so well,
Who went beyond the reach of care,
And left the home of sweetness bare.
So from the silent mounds of sod
I'll sing the happy Home of God.

I saw the sweetest bride on earth
Arrayed to meet her spouse.
Her love—a priceless jewel worth;
No doubt was in her vows.
So fair, so sweet, so worthy song—
But earthly charms ne'er tarry long:

And yet her sight my thought sufficed
To mind me of the Bride of Christ.

The Victor rides triumphant on,
  While Death his servant is;
His glorious fame he thinks upon,
  It is his happiness.
But Death anon the traitor plays,
And soul and body go their ways.
No lower Victor buys my breath
Than One, the Victor over Death.

I saw the highest King of earth
  His way majestic pass.
I deemed that men of royal birth
  In glory should surpass.
But they who seek earth's highest seat,
The truest glories fail to meet;
And though their praise each minstrel sings,
My song shall be the King of Kings.

In all the best and choicest strings
  That human skill can tune,
A strained and cracked vibration rings
  And make us end too soon.
The perfect theme is high above;
We need the harp attuned to love,
We need the life from sin set free,
And then the song shall perfect be.

—*Mar. 10.*

AT HOLY COMMUNION.

DEAR Lord, Who so hast made Thy best creation,
That all should live in Thee,
Prepare my soul for blessed contemplation
By faith and purity.

Give me a hunger for Thy blest perfection,
Disdain for self's poor deeds,
And then admit me to that sweet refection,
Where each true servant feeds.

Grant to my soul the wings of true devotion,
Grant brightness here unknown;
Bear me in love, by blissful inward motion,
To worship at Thy throne.

Our breath will fail us for Thy praises singing,
But Thou canst never fail.
Grant us at last, our heavenward courses winging,
Thy glorious face to hail.

—*March 17.*

LITTLE GIFTS.

A LITTLE time, you'll never miss it,
Give it to God, who gave you all.
At best there'll be a great deficit,
When e'er the reckoning may fall.
Give it to God ; for all your hurry
There's much that's lost in waste and worry.
Beginnings, endings, save them all.
A little time, you'll never miss it.

A little love, our all is little,
Like flitting birds our likings fly.
The ties that bind our hearts are brittle ;
Our dearest ones are called to die.
But love that goes to God and heaven
Transforms the life like hidden leaven,

And makes us welcome in the sky.
A little love, our all is little.

A little prayer, a mighty answer
Can bring from Him who heareth men;
Can cure the deep and growing cancer
That pains our souls, and pains again.
It gives us hope and comfort cheering,
When we the days of gloom are nearing;
Few words, perhaps, but eager then!
A little prayer, a mighty answer.

A little gold may gild the edges,
When life's bound book comes out one day,
If hidden in "highways and hedges,"
Or with the heart is given away.
Two mites, perhaps, that make a farthing,
May bring the giver back a bargain.
Your life upon the altar lay,
A little gold may gild the edges.

God speaks by every "jot and tittle,"
  And promises eternity.
Our faith and hope and love are little,
  But come from His paternity.
Then leave we all the motes we grope for,
And grasp the All Christ bids us hope for,
  Who healeth our infirmity,
And speaks by every "jot and tittle."

—*March 31.*

LOVE'S WORK.

LOVE can wait,
Though it be beside the cross,
Though each moment bring the loss
Of peace, and adds but pain to pain,
Where all our will to help is vain.
So waited, through the dreadful gloom,
The Maries, till the rock-hewn tomb
Received its Holy charge at Joseph's hands.
Then they returned and kept the Law's demands
And rested on the Sabbath. Love can wait.

Love rises early,
And an early worship brings;
Like the lark from sleep upsprings,
And turns the darkness into light,
With glowing face and purpose bright.
So came the Maries, in the gray
Dull morning where the Saviour lay,
Bringing their spices to embalm their King,

And found the tokens of His wakening;
And angels greeted them. Love rises early.

Love's step is fleet.
So two disciples run apace,
And strive in a fraternal race.
Here to the tomb runs eager Peter,
But steady John of foot is fleeter.
Both full of love, but one held back,
To younger sinews yields the track,
And John sees first victorious tokens there,
Where Judah's Lion had his three days' lair.
Both find new faith and hope. Love's step is fleet.

Love sees afar.
As on the Galilean shore
The fishers saw one comrade more,
Who called them children, and success
Brings to their empty weariness;
So one far-eyed, clear-minded soul,
Drawn as a magnet to the pole,
Cried out, "It is the Lord!" Then through the tide
Swims Peter to his Blessed Master's side,
Nor needs to question Him. Love sees afar.

Love must work.
If thou lovest well the Lord,
Think not thy life will ease afford;
But prove thy spirit's worthiness
By striving Jesus' lambs to bless,
And feeding those few straying sheep
That every Christian has to keep.
For he who echoes thus the blood-stained Cain,
"Am I my brother's keeper?" asks a vain
And heartless question. Truly Love must work.

Love never dies.
Who loveth not has not been born.
God meets the kind heart every morn,
And gives him warmth though days be chill,
And gives him life no man can kill.
His hand sustains him in his tasks.
His bounties feed him ere he asks.
Goy lives forever; and His loving child,
Whose pattern is the risen Saviour mild,
Shall never taste of death. Love never dies.

—*April 7.*

THE RISEN VOICE.

WHAT did the little maiden say
When Christ had raised her from the bed of death?
She, Jairus' daughter, who so peaceful lay
Sleeping, the Master said, but fled her breath?
Nothing, O nothing of that wondrous land
Whence her sweet soul returned at His command.
The Saviour spoke with power and tenderness,
Strong to raise up and willing still to bless.
But she said nothing. Mystery remains.

What said the widow's only son
When borne without the city gate at Nain,
Much people following the stricken one
Striving to comfort her, O effort vain?
When Christ stood still and touched the mournful bier,
And bade the dead arise, and holy fear

Fell on the marveling minds of those who heard,
And saw the working of that thrilling word?
He gave no tidings. Mystery remains.

What said our Lord's dear Lazarus,
When he had lain four days in death's embrace,
And tenanted the cave's dark narrowness?
When Jesus, weeping, groaning, turned His face
To heaven, and with His word of power called
Forth from the tomb that friend by death enthralled?
O miracle stupendous! Much and well
Of our uncertain future he could tell;
But he said nothing. Mystery remains.

What said the Father's Only Son,
Our glorious Elder Brother, three days dead,
Who, ere corruption's traces had begun,
Raised up again His own triumphant head?
He told us all the spirit panted for,—
How God's own saints, their toil and trouble o'er,
Await a glorious rising from the tomb.
His word was "Peace." Peace waiteth in the gloom,
And death becomes a holy Mystery.

Ye who are risen up from sin,
  Proclaim the peace that Christ has brought to you.
The Prince of Peace His battle fought to win
  Comfort and strength and grace to live anew,
For all the heavy laden, grieved, perplexed.
To all through fear of death in bondage vexed,
Love brings from death's own door these words to-day—
"Come see the peaceful place where Jesus lay."
  O Death, why should we fear thy Mystery?

—*April 21.*

MAY.

WHAT a world of baby buds
And twigs in pink and yellow!
Every little maple bloom
A nodding to its fellow.
Violets on a sunny bank,
And sparrows all a chatter,—
All to greet the merry May,
And nothing else the matter.
May, May, don't delay,
Don't put off a single day!
March was freezing, April teasing,
Come and join us in our play!

Just a jolly little girl
With curly hair a blowing,
Chasing shadows on the lawn,
Cheeks like roses glowing.

Dandelions for her crown,
  Almost for her pillow;
Motions like the thistle down,
  Supple as the willow.
May, May, do not stay!
  Supper time must end your play.
Dews are falling, mother's calling,
  Happy maiden, happy day!

—*May 6.*

THE SWALLOW.

FLIT, flit, little swallow,
Every wayward impulse follow
O'er the silver surface of the stream!
Skip, dip to fright the fishes!
Chase, race like wanton wishes,
Where the shallows dance and lightly gleam!

See how it shows its bosom—how its wings,
With ready stroke control its eddying flight,
Along the placid brook, and now it brings
A backward course, and o'er the daisies bright—
Now east, now west,
Downward, upward
To its nest.

'Tis like the lofty soul
Which, raised and borne
On soaring pinions of the mind,
Dips downward o'er life's currents as they roll,
Skims o'er their surface in the fragrant morn,
But never damps its pinions, and doth find
Its power fresh to seek its Maker's dole.
And as the swallow loves to build and dwell,
Beneath man's sheltering eaves, in humble clay;
So, for a time, clay walls may serve us well,
But not without God's shelter; and the day
Will come, when He who builds on high,
Will welcome all His nestlings to the sky.

—*May 12.*

A MARIPOSA LILY.

FROM where the Rockies tower,
I've a letter come to-day,
With a little yellow flower
That has caught a heavenly ray.
'Tis very like a daffodilly,
And called a Mariposa lily.

Now Mariposa's dainty,
And it tinkles like a bell;
And while it breathes but faintly
Must have a tale to tell.
A Spanish friend thus makes reply—
"*It means a restless butterfly,*"

So thus we read the letter,—
My dear has sent her soul.
No words could speak it better
Than this symbolic role.
The soul is like the butterfly
Which never resteth till it die.

Yet rests it well in dying,
And wings a better flight,
Forgetting all its sighing
In everlasting light.
My love thus vows her life for me;
And my heart, dearest, is with thee.

My full responsive feeling
Beyond the sunset flies,
And speeds a kiss for sealing
What the lily tells my eyes.
O yellow scrap of sunset sky,
Be thou to her my butterfly!

* * * * * *

Don't think, impulsive reader,
There are weddings in the air;
Though none could be a pleader
For any hand more fair.
Those far-off eyes that for me glister,
Belong to—just my only sister.

—*Aug. 28.*

THE DAY OF DEATH.

THE day of death is ever in my mind,
That I a faithful Monitor may find
To prompt me well in righteousness to live,
As one who knows that he account must give;
And so it is my friend.

When toil oppresses and I find no sleep,
Sometimes o'er days between I fain would leap;
For sleep is more than riches, sleep is blest;
And on that day, I'll sink to peaceful rest;
And so it is my friend.

When this poor house of clay is racked with pain,
To dress it gaily seemeth effort vain.
And so, I think, the fairest garb will be
The one I'll don when death doth call for me,
Whom Christ doth make my friend.

The sorely wounded calls aloud for death:
When breathing's torture, who would strive for
breath?
And when God wills our bitterness to end,
A shining angel he in love doth send,
And he will be our friend.

My soul doth dwell in house with walls so thin
That I could easy breach them, but 'twere sin
To leave the place where I am set to bide,
And labor for the glory of the Bride,
Who weds my dearest friend.

So there are days when Jesus draweth nigh,
And I can praise Him for the life that I
Do live by faith in Him, and patient stay
And serve Him till my spirit's passing day,
When Death shall be my friend.

And as for those who love me as I am,
I shall not lose them; though the Holy Lamb
Do call them hence before my day shall come.
For Christ of love and friendship is the Sum,
And He will keep my friend.

—*Sept. 1.*

WILD ASTERS.

OVER brown meadows and through the gay trees,
Cometh the soft September breeze.
And wherever the scythe has spared their beds,
Stand the Wild Asters a bobbing their heads.
Sturdy they are and yet polite,
Gazing unwinkingly into the light.

Country-side saints with an aureole wide,
And a deep, dark heart embraced inside,
The rich, full heart that never faints,—
Ah, Love has the making of all true saints.
Patient, too, though the frost comes soon,
And the wind is learning November's tune.

Asters, you shame me, away with my frown!
I'll bear a bright nosegay back into the town.
Lighten me, brighten me, let nothing frighten me.
Though I bear grief, there is One who will righten me.
With a right good heart, let me lift my head,
And smile my summer into bed.

—*Sept. 8.*

THE YEAR OF SAINTS.

NOT round the world has been our way,
But nearly round the year;
With shortened step and short'ning day,
The goal we're drawing near.
We've marked the way, not by the mile
But met a saint each little while
The weary road to cheer.
We've passed them all, and still before
We journey toward the open door.

Good Andrew saw the course begun,
And beckons now to rest,
With doubting Thomas faith we won
And peace with Stephen blest.
Evangelists have made us glad,
And martyrs' trials left us sad,
Though sure their end was best.
But now all troubles find amends,
When we may call All Saints our friends.

But still Thy chariot seems to wait,
  Whom most we long to meet.
The world is sad, the times are late,
  Our prayers than steps more fleet.
If we outlive All Saints, like John,
Give us Thy face to look upon,
  Thy City's golden street.
To Thee our endings we resign,
If all our hearts and wills be Thine.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

'TIS starlight now, on street and plain,
While I my watch do keep,
For earthly sound I list in vain,
The very world's asleep.
Yet the little stars so restless seem,
All twinkling with delight,
And music sounds as in a dream,
From all the hosts of light.

No shepherd I, nor Bethlehem,
The town I call my home,
Yet cares will bid me wake for them,
And thoughts that restless roam.
I need a gift, a holy gift,
To fill my life with peace,
From weary heart a load to lift,
From sinfulness release.

It seemeth me the stars have wings,
And float in heaven full low.
They may not speak, those airy things,
And yet their truth I know.

They voice with tuneful, thrilling cry,
The glory of the Lord,
In peace on high, they downward fly,
And keep their brilliant ward.

The peace on high speaks peace to earth,
And passion lies asleep,
Good thoughts in silence come to birth,
Our sorry past we weep.
O stars, or angels, if ye be,
Tell out the truth ye know!
Sing out the Lord's Nativity,
To us who need him so.

My baby Boy's in yonder cot,
In slumber's gentle arms.
God, keep his soul from every spot,
And safe in all alarms.
That with Thy Spirit on his head,
Full many a soul forlorn,
Led sweetly to the House of Bread,
May know that Christ is born.

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